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ABSTRACT

A report is given of a procedure that may be used by teachers to reconsider their educational beliefs and practices, and determine whether their teaching behaviors are in accordance with their professed beliefs. Part I of the procedure, the Educational Beliefs System Inventory, is a 69-item inventory composed of statements of beliefs about human nature, motivation, conditions of learning, social learning, intellectual development, knowledge, and society. An equal number of statements from three different philosophic camps accompany these statements so the teacher may check a preferred philosophy. The choices are drawn from: (1) behavioristic psychology (essentialism); (2) cognitive psychology (experimentalism); and (3) humanistic psychology (existentialism). The second part of the procedure, the Educational Practice Belief Inventory, requires responses to statements on beliefs about instruction, curriculum, organization, content, materials and resources, and evaluation and provides a philosophical profile of the individual relative to the three philosophic camps. A graphic depiction of results will produce an individual profile of beliefs and practices. It is suggested that comparison and discussion of the profiles will inspire thinking and dialogue about the professional direction the teacher or faculty wish to pursue. (JD)

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The Congruency of Teachers'
Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

While the philosophy of individual teachers is considered important, there is evidence suggesting that relatively few teachers have developed consistent philosophies, i.e., teaching behaviors that are in accordance with their professed beliefs. This manuscript reports on a procedure (instrument) whereby teachers can constructively reconsider their educational beliefs and practices.

The Congruency of Teachers'

Beliefs and Practices

Since Dewey (1910, 1964) there has been an increasing belief that a teacher's philosophy is the basis for making decisions about the educational process. Wiles and Bondi (1979) suggest that educational philosophies are the heart of purposeful activity. While the philosophy of individual teachers is considered important, there is ample evidence to suggest that relatively few teachers have developed internally consistent philosophies, i.e., teaching behaviors that are in accordance with their professed beliefs (Brown, 1968; Childress & Dobson, 1973; Davis, Dobson & Shelton, 1973; Deal, Dobson & Dobson, 1982; Dobson, Goldenberg & Elsom, 1972; Dobson, Hopkins & Elsom, 1973; Dobson, Sewell & Shelton, 1974; Kessinger, 1979; Wright, 1980).

Hall (1977) states that "somehow in the United States, we have managed to transform one of the most rewarding of all human activities into a painful, boring, dull, fragmenting, mindshaking, soul-shriveling experience" (p. 207). In a somewhat similar vein, Dobson, Dobson and Kessinger (1980) believe that there has been a progressively widening split in the ranks of persons concerned with the purposes and processes of education in the United States. As a result, this split has had a proven effect on trends in both theory and practice. Brown (1938) believes that the establishment of the unnatural split between theory and practice has led to a discrepancy between what teachers say they know and believe in theory and how they teach or fail to teach in practice. This is called the theory-practice dilemma.

Furthermore, according to Dobson, Dobson, and Kessinger (1980) the art of philosophizing, as important as it may be to educational planning and decision making, has never gained respect in America. If one uses Lewis' (1975) definition of philosophy, i.e., "... a coherent and consistent organization of beliefs and values, which is a necessary tool in order to choose, define, and organize the goals and objectives for the school," (p. 111) then one begins to visualize the nature of a potentially serious problem. An example, offered by Brown (1968), is the observation that official statements of educational philosophy all across the nation avow that the most important task of teachers in a free society is to develop citizens who are committed to and skilled in the process of thinking. In reality there has been an enormous failure to live up to this promise. However, Dobson, Dobson, and Kessinger (1980) believe this situation can be avoided if an identified, hopefully shared, philosophy can be established. This philosophical base would allow a faculty to order priorities, establish goals, identify activities, analyze conflicting proposals, and to convert controversy into meaningful school experiences.

Goodlad (1983) warns that teaching will not improve much until entire staffs take their teaching out of the closet for self-examination. At the same time principals and superintendents need to rely less on outside consultants. Activities need to be designed that will release the power inherent in school-based groups, especially principals and teachers. Similarly, Eisner (1983) suggests the source of genuine improvement is in the school itself and even more particularly in the classroom.

To recapitulate, we believe any real improvement in schooling will occur only when each teacher is experiencing beliefs-practice congruency. The remainder of this paper presents a process that can be used for

personal assessment of beliefs-practice congruency.

A Tool For Dialogue

Our attempts at assisting various faculty groups in their efforts to identify the degree of congruence between their beliefs and practices indicated the need for a tool to facilitate dialogue. Therefore, an instrument was developed entitled Part I: Educational Beliefs System Inventory and Part II: Educational Practice Believe Inventory (Dobson, Dobson & Kessinger, 1980). The purposes of the instrument is to identify the degree to which teachers are experiencing congruency between their professed beliefs and educational practices. The instrumentation is intended as a tool for dialogue and self-assessment rather than a technique for measurement.

The Educational Beliefs System Inventory

The Educational Beliefs System inventory (EBSI) is a 69 item inventory composed of statements clustered under the following sub-tests.

1. What do you believe about Human Nature?
2. What do you believe about Motivation?
3. What do you believe about the Conditions of Learning?
4. What do you believe about Social Learning?
5. What do you believe about Intellectual Development?
6. What do you believe about Knowledge?
7. What do you believe about Society?

Each sub-test contains an equal number of statements from three educational camps: (A) Behavioristic psychology—Essentialism philosophy, (B) Cognitive psychology—Experimentalism philosophy, and (C) Humanistic psychology—Existentialism philosophy (these three camps are refereed to as A, B, and C). Each sub-test is designed to yield three sets of scores for

an individual, which correspond to the three particular educational camps.

The Educational Practice Belief Inventory

The Educational Practice Belief Inventory (EPBI) is a 69 item inventory composed of statements clustered under the following sub-tests:

1. What do you believe about Instruction?
2. What do you believe about Curriculum?
3. What do you believe about Organization?
4. What do you believe about Content?
5. What do you believe about Materials and Resources?
6. What do you believe about Evaluation?

The EPBI instrument, as does the EBSI, yields a philosophical profile for the individual relative to the three educational camps. A key for interpreting each sub-test according to the three camps has been created and can be used for facilitating interpretation of an individual's scores (profile).

Validity and Reliability. The two instruments have been validated by a panel of experts. Reliability was achieved through the use of the Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Reliability Scale. The internal consistency reliability for the total A, B, and C sub-tests for the Educational Beliefs System Inventory are A = .858; B = .796; C = .810. The internal consistency reliability for the total A, B, and C sub-tests for the Educational Practice Belief System are A = .825; B = .846; C = .795. When the two instruments are combined and considered as a whole, the total reliability for the A, B, and C sub-tests are: .917, .884, .896.

Profile

The results of the scores of the EBSI and EPBI can be graphically

plotted to provide each individual with A, B, and C profiles. When scores from the thirteen sub-tests are plotted graphically, teachers can determine: (a) if their personal educational beliefs and practices are congruent or in conflict, and (b) the degree of compatibility between their personal educational philosophy and that of their colleagues.

The profiles of teachers experiencing congruency show beliefs closely aligned with their practices in one of the three camps. This would be represented graphically by a horizontal line or almost horizontal line on sub-tests 1-7 (educational beliefs) and on sub-tests 9-14 (beliefs about educational practices). A strong belief would be graphed with a horizontal line either toward the top (complete disagreement) or near the bottom (complete agreement) of the individual profile sheet. An individual whose profile shows a horizontal line around the middle score (3) merely exhibits uncertainty.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 is a graphic presentation of an individual teacher's professed beliefs and practices represented by a solid line and the faculty's composite profile represented by a broken line. In Figure 1 the "A" sub-test scores indicate this teacher's general disagreement with Behavioristic psychology and Essentialism philosophy as well as general disagreement with Behavioristic-Essentialism practice. The faculty's belief profile fluctuates from agreement with sub-test 2 (Motivation) to disagreement with sub-test 5 (Intellectual Development). The faculty's teaching practice profile mainly indicates uncertainty.

The "B" scores in Figure 1 indicate the teacher's agreement with

Cognitive psychology and Experimentalism philosophy in sub-test 2 (Motivation), sub-test 3 (Conditions of Learning), and sub-test 4 (Social Learning). This teacher disagrees with Cognitive psychology and Experimentalism philosophy on sub-tests 5 (Intellectual Development) and 6 (Knowledge). In practice, there is disagreement on sub-test 12 (Content) and 13 (Materials and Resources) but agreement on sub-test 14 (Evaluation). The faculty profile reveals that as a whole the teachers' beliefs and practices closely follow Cognitive psychology and Experimentalism philosophy.

The "C" profile indicates this teacher's general disagreement with Humanistic psychology and Existential philosophy relative to the nature of society (sub-test 7). The composite score (sub-test 8) of this teacher's "C" profile indicates an uncertain position. Profiles B and C indicate a blending of Cognitive psychology and Experimentalism philosophy with Humanistic psychology and Existential philosophy in education beliefs. In beliefs about practice, this teacher ranges from moderate to total agreement with Humanistic psychology and Existential philosophy. The faculty profile indicates that collectively the teachers tend to favor Humanism and Existentialism in educational practices. However, overall they are more closely aligned with Cognitive psychology and Experimentalism in educational beliefs.

The purpose of creating a profile is not to convince a teacher nor a faculty to change philosophic beliefs or teaching behaviors. Hopefully, the profile will inspire thinking and dialogue about the personal and professional direction the teacher or faculty wish to pursue. The strength of the instrument lies in the dialogue that follows the reporting of results. If a teacher or the entire faculty is dissatisfied with the results, then the

profile(s) can be used as a tool(s) for planning and decision making.

Dialogue relative to the results of the instruments simply does not allow for ignoring crucial philosophical issues.

Conclusion

Many difficulties will be met in the process of making value positions congruent with practices, for the process supposes the exercise of personal freedom in making sound choices. The process is sometimes frustrating but also rewarding as teachers make sense of their beliefs and practices. As teachers bring beliefs and practices together through thought and action, to a level of critical awareness, contradictions arise. Every new conflict posed by teachers becomes a problem that deserves to be treated with dialogical praxis.

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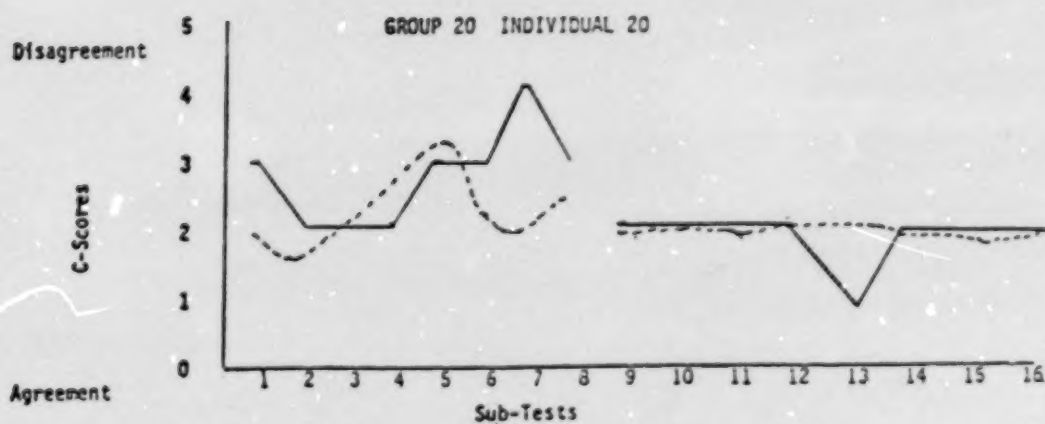
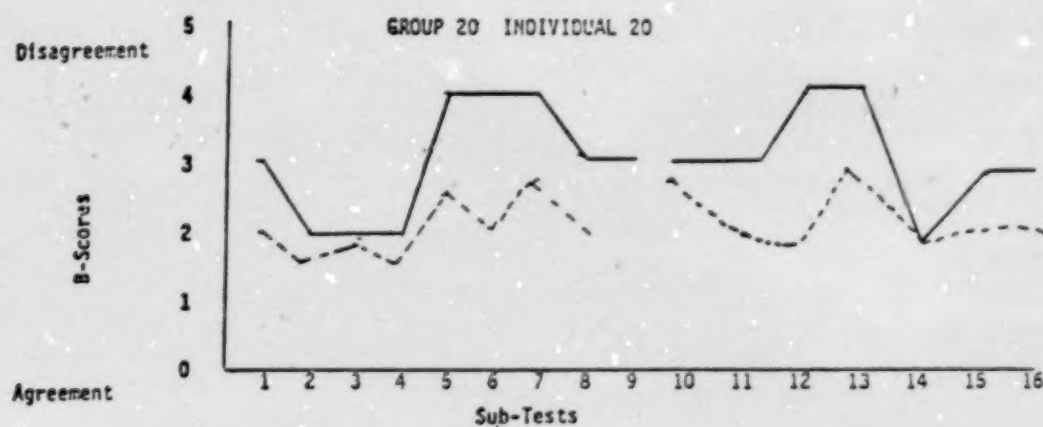
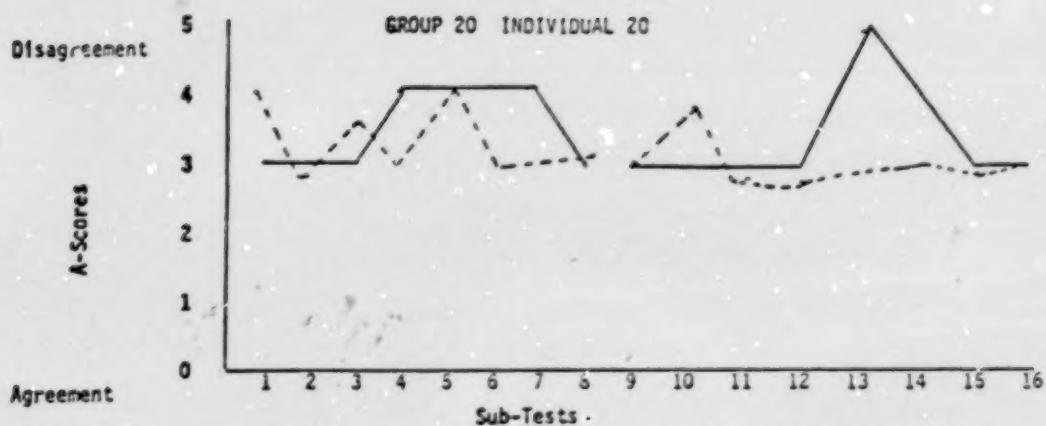


Figure 1. A sample non-congruent profile of a teacher.